

Med Essafi October 17, 2014 · Casablanca :

Please sort out the following confusion once and for all : our course data come from mother-tongues because the ultimate aim of our inquiry is the issue of 'language acquisition' , which is unique to our species.

Med Essafi November 18, 2014 · Casablanca

We have been busy in the recent weeks dwelling on the claim that 'language is a cognitive property of humans' ; the human mind is equipped with a device that enables humans produce language in the way they do , a way which is different from that of any other living creature. This device is dubbed the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) , which is assumed to be behind our 'natural' use of our mother-tongue. The study of LAD and the explanation of its workings is the aim of Modern Linguistics , and for that matter Syntax , which is the study of how humans group words into sentences and the innate knowledge rules behind this ability. In this sense , Syntax is said to be a cognitive science.

In order to explain the Syntax of Language (notice the capital 'L' which stands for the universal ability that all humans share) , we need to model a theory of Syntax , and this has been the endeavour of many linguists since the 50's. The leading theory in this respect is the one known as TGG (Transformational Generative Grammar) , which , through the decades , has developed into the ST (Standard Theory) , the EST (Extended Standard Theory) , GB (Government and Binding) , PP (Principles and Parameters) , and recently the MP (Minimalist Programme). All of these major shifts of the theory fall within the boundaries of the Generative Tradition.

The leading claim underlying the Generative Tradition is that sentences are generated by an innate set of computer programme-like procedures which are part of the mind of the native speaker , or otherwise called the ' cognitive abilities'. The optimal objective of the theory of syntax is to model these procedures / abilities. The modelling occurs through formal rules ; these are not 'prescriptive' but 'generative' , that is they tell us in 'step-by-step' fashion how we build sentences.

The rules are 'finite' , that is limited in number , but their output is 'infinite'. A rule such as :

S → NP Aux VP

is one rule but it will be behind generating all the constructions of this word order type. Claiming that the rules are finite is of paramount importance as it helps reach the economy and generalization that linguistic research aims at.

(to be continued)

December 11, 2014

Below is the exercise to do for next week :

* Assign an Xbar structure to the following sentences.

- Bill remembers the unhappy experience.
- Bill left early.
- Incidentally, Bill left early.
- John believes that Bill should resign.
- John really believes that Bill should resign.
- Bill went to London to see his parents.
- Bill arrived after he had left.
- Bill sent a letter to John.

Med Essafi uploaded a file. December 19, 2014

Heads , specifiers , complements , and adjuncts.

Med Essafi December 28, 2014 · Casablanca

Awfully sorry but won't be able to make it tomorrow for the Monday morning session we agreed on ; have just been reminded of an embassy appointment I thought was in Jan 2015...W'll have to find another slot ; open to your suggestions !

Med Essafi

February 15, 2015 · Casablanca

Grades between 16 and 2 ; 2 was for almost blank sheets. The serious regular students made it ; some of the names with whom I'm familiar disappointed me a bit. Some answers were more impressions and vague remarks rather than rigorous and terminology-based answers. Questions 6 and 7 were about the sentence in question 5 , but most of you gave general answers without using the question-5 data. The catch-up will be in the same conditions and spirit ! GOOD LUCK TO ALL OF YOU !

Med Essafi

February 22, 2015 · Casablanca

Insolent are some of your posts about your teachers. Nothing surprising from a generation that has no more guiding values. As for me , those who had worked hard , not that hard , got what I wholeheartedly believed they deserved and a bit more. In fact , you all had a bit more ; your real grade is the one posted minus 2. I'm a very balanced person , and I don't think I need any psychological tuning , as some of you might suggest. I read everything and anything that you post ; most of it is full of grammar and usage mistakes unworthy of S5 students. Instead of shooting at

teachers , shoot at your notes , if you have any ! When I was your age , the best grade I hoped for was 13 ! I knew my limits and worked hard on them. Do you happen to know your limits or is the sky your limit ? Some of you cheated , but I overlooked that , and some of your teachers did , too. Have some respect for us (the teachers) to have respect for you. Don't make of this whole thing an open war , as you don't have the guts for it !

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December 19, 2014

X-bar trees exercise ; consider pages 1 to 4 only ; half way through page 4 onward deals with issues that we haven't handled yet.

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December 11, 2014

X-bar slides with focus on :

- notion 'head' and 'projection of head';
- functional and lexical categories.

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October 16, 2014

Class notes , Thursday , October 16th !

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December 11, 2014 at
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